

Scholars of *Hadith*

By
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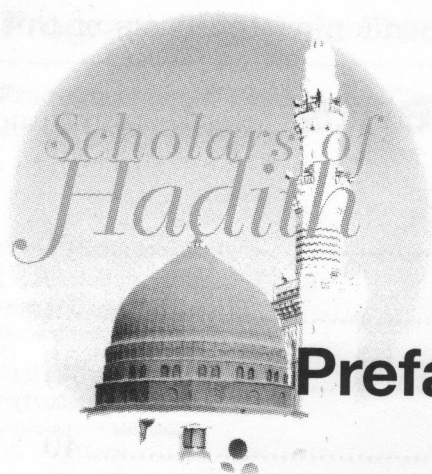
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Preface

In his work, *Tarikh-i Da'wat wa 'Azimat*, Syed Abul-Hasan 'Ali Nadvi accurately points out that *hadith* literature is the pre-eminent source for the study of the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Think of it, he says, as a diary of the events of the twenty-three years of the prophetic life of the Messenger of Allah, of his role in society as a statesman, a religious leader, a husband, and of course, as a father. The *Sunnah* (pl. *Sunan*) is the totality of his teachings and actions, which is compiled in the *hadith* literature, and next to the Qur'an, has always served as the second most important source of Islamic Shari'ah. His *Sunnah* also offers the most beautiful pattern of life that humanity has since tried to emulate in order to gain success in this world and in the Hereafter. Ancient *fuqaha'* and *mujtahidun* as well as modern Muslim scholars have looked to his *Sunnah* to reform Muslim society and revive the creative spirit of early Islam. Thus, any call for Muslims to return

to true Islam can only be made on the basis of this fountainhead.

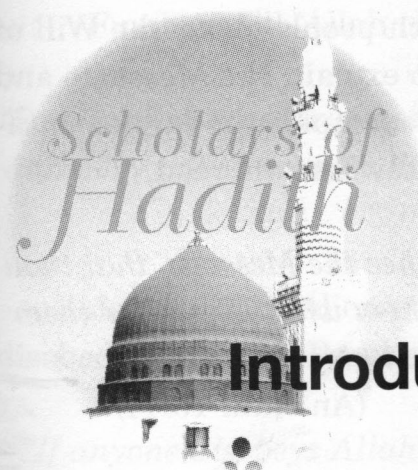
Whenever recourse to *hadith* literature diminishes, Muslim society becomes deluged by the cultural mentalities of particular localities and loses the true essence of Islam. The 'Ummah has not been ignorant of the fact that for determining the authenticity of the *Sunnah*, the way of the Messenger of Allah, it must refer to its custodians, the *muhaddithun* who strove to maintain the originality of this genre of Islamic literature for future generations. The unique and unparalleled continuity of the Islamic tradition that goes back to the Messenger of Allah is maintained by Islamic *madaris* and 'ulama'. Unfortunately, very little of this veritable tradition is known to the popular masses. Therefore, this present work is a modest effort to introduce common seekers of knowledge to information about the nature and methodology of *Hadith* literature and the life and times of those unique paragons of scholarship and piety--the celebrated *muhaddithun*. In addition, it is an effort to present a synopsis of the history and methodology of the more prominent of these scholars to the general reader.

It is the combination of piety and a serious methodology that privileged following generations to inherit this genre of Islamic literature. Given that this was so vital a component of Islam's legacy, it became imperative to the *muhaddithun*, the scholars of *hadith*, that the teachings, sayings, actions, and

advice and guidance that he provided but also for giving his valuable time in editing some chapters of the manuscript of this work. My thanks are also due to Professor Muhammad Naim Siddiqui, M.A. (Oxford) London, retired Professor of English, Usmania University, Hyderabad, India, for language editing of the manuscript. Last but not in the least, I am grateful to my grandsons Sami Ahmad, Imran Ansari, and Salman Ansari for their valuable help in typing and compiling this manuscript.

It goes without saying, however, that the shortcomings herein are entirely due to my own limitations. May Allah accept this humble effort.

Syed Bashir Ali
Detroit 2001



Introduction

One who accepts Islam makes a covenant and promise to obey the commands of Allah, for the Qur'an declares:

"Obey Allah and His Messenger if you believe"
(Al-Anfal 8:17)

Allah sent His messages to humanity indirectly through the medium of His Messenger. In the words of the Qur'an,

"Allah conferred a great favor on the Believers when He sent among them a Messenger from among themselves, rehearsing unto them the Verses of Allah, sanctifying them, instructing them in Scripture and Wisdom, while before that they had been in manifest error"
(Al 'Imran 3:164)

And,

"He who obeys the Messenger obeys Allah"

(An-Nisa' 4:80)

Thus the status of the Messenger of Allah is not that of a mere postman; he is in all respects an authority and a model to be obeyed and emulated. Clearly then, submission and service to Allah lie only in following the advice and teachings of the Messenger of Allah.

Status of *Sunnah*

If the Qur'an holds a position as the heart of Islamic knowledge, the knowledge of *ahadith* is certainly its jugular vein. After all, explanations of the Qur'an regarding the establishment of its orders and the meanings of the literal verses and the allegorical verses are possible only with the help of *ahadith*.

As the Andalusian jurist ash-Shatibi explains, with the Qur'an there is often a possibility of two or more interpretations for a single verse; arriving at the most correct one of these is done with the aid of the *Sunnah*. As a result, the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* are the two fountainheads of Islamic Shari'ah, with the Qur'an acting as the constitution and the *Sunnah* as the legislator of its principles. Among the *Sahabah* (Companions) of the Prophet, the latter's word was taken as the word of Allah. Their successors and later scholars generally held the same view throughout Islamic history. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself,

before his final departure advised people, "I am leaving behind with you the Book of Allah and my *Sunnah*, the two are such things that if you hold them firmly, you will not go astray."

The Qur'an speaks about *iman*, morality, and ethics, making its status that of a constitution. Clarifying the basic law and deducing from it comprehensive rules and regulations for every aspect of human life is, in fact, the work of the traditions. Even the masters of the Arabic language, present during the time of the revelations, had to seek help from the Prophet in understanding the providential intent of many verses of the Qur'an. Furthermore, there are innumerable problems whose answers are not directly available in the Qur'an.

Accordingly, the noted medieval theologian Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah collected the questions that the *Sahabah* presented to the Messenger of Allah for their clarifications; these clarifications were said to be so numerous that they covered more than one hundred pages. If the *Sahabah*, in spite of their closeness to the Prophet, were in such need of his clarifications, then it goes without saying that people who come after the *Sahabah* surely require much greater clarification of the Qur'anic verses. In the absence of the Prophet, this help can only be provided by means of the traditions and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. It is important to remember that even detailed instructions about four of the five pillars of Islam--namely, *salah*, *zakah*, *sawm*, and *hajj*, are not found in the Qur'an. These

but whenever they were in any doubt, they would immediately open their books to double check. Manazir al-*Hasan* al-Gilani claimed, "Of the treasure of knowledge which is now available, a major portion of it, or at least the class-one *sahih ahadith*, were put in black and white principally by the eyewitnesses themselves during their own time."

The Collections of the Sahabah

The collection of *ahadith* began in the lifetime of the Prophet himself. Al-Bukhari, in his *Sahih*, narrated that during the conquest of Makkah, the Prophet delivered a rather long sermon, which a person from Yemen requested in written form. The Prophet then ordered a scribe to comply with this request.

'Abdullah ibn 'Amr said, "In order to safeguard the *ahadith*, I used to write down every word spoken by the Prophet. Some persons dissuaded me from writing and said, 'You write down everything you hear from the Prophet, even though he is also human. Sometimes he is pleased and sometimes displeased.' After listening to this, I stopped writing and informed the Prophet, but he said,

"Keep writing. By the One in whose hands my life rests, nothing except the truth comes out of my mouth."

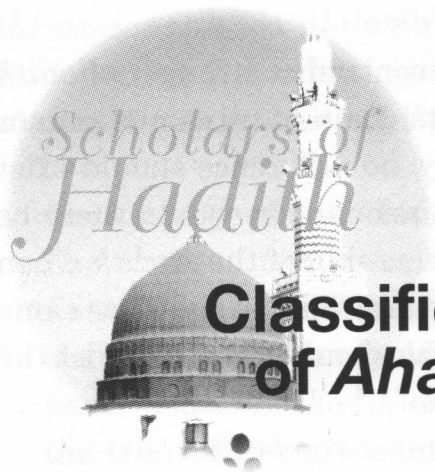
Abu Hurairah also said, "Among the *Sahabah*, only 'Abdullah, the son of 'Amr preserved more *ahadith*

than I did; he always wrote down the *ahadith*--I did not." The prominent traditionist Ibn Hajar 'Asqalani says that Abu Hurairah did not write *ahadith* during the time of the Prophet, but thereafter he either wrote them down personally or dictated them. 'Amr ibn Umayyah narrated, "Once in the presence of Abu Hurairah, there was some discussion on a particular *hadith*. He held my hand and took me to his house and showed me his books of *ahadith* and said, 'See, that *hadith* is in writing with me.'" Anas, who had the privilege of reciting his collection of *ahadith* to the Prophet after recording them, would present these writings to the people and say, "These *ahadith* are those which I had written down and presented to the Prophet after having heard them from him."

Thus, the work of recording and preserving *ahadith* began in the early days of Islam by the *Sahabah* themselves and often in response to the directives of the Prophet himself. The following lists some of the more prominent examples of their collections:

1) *As-Sahifa: The collection of 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'As*. There are about one thousand *ahadith* in this collection. If, as reported by Abu Hurairah, Ibn 'Amr recorded more *ahadith* than him, then this could only mean that Ibn 'Amr had more than five thousand *ahadith* in writing or a thousand more than Abu Hurairah himself.

2) *The Book of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib*. 'Ali, the cousin and



Classification of Ahadith

I. Chain of Transmission (*Sanad*)

A. Quality of the chain of transmission

1. *Hadith Mutawatir* ("The Recurring *Hadith*"):

This is a *hadith* reported by a large number of people at different times that makes it virtually impossible for any falsehood to creep in. This would make agreement upon a lie unthinkable. This condition must be met in the entire chain from its source to the end.

2. *Hadith al-Ahad* ("The Non-recurring *Hadith*"):

This is any *hadith* which is not *mutawatir*. This is a *hadith* that is narrated in the first three generations by one to four narrators. The *ahad hadith* is further classified under three subcategories:

a. Number of narrators

- (1) ***Mashhur*** ("Well-known"): This is a *hadith* which was originally narrated in the first generation by two to four narrators. Later, on their authority, these were narrated by several narrators.
- (2) ***'Aziz*** ("Strong"): A *hadith* bearing no less than two narrators in each link of the chain of transmission;
- (3) ***Gharib*** ("Unusual"): A *hadith* that has been narrated by a single person at any one point in the chain.

b. Beginning of the chain of transmission

- (1) ***Marfu'*** ("Elevated"): A *hadith* whose chain of narration traces back to the Prophet ﷺ;
- (2) ***Mawquf*** ("Suspended"): A *hadith* that is traced back to one of the *Sahabah* and is not traced back to the Prophet ﷺ.
- (3) ***Maqtu'*** ("Cut-off"): A *hadith* in which the chain of transmission is traced back to a *taba'i* or successor of a *Sahabah*.

c. Acceptance as a source of Islamic law

- (1) ***Sahih*** ("Authentic or sound"): A *hadith* that satisfies all five criteria for acceptance as a source of law.
- (2) ***Hasan*** ("Good or approved"): A *hadith* that satisfies all five criteria for acceptance,

with the exception that some of its transmitters are found to have a defective memory in comparison with transmitters of an *As-Sahih Hadith*.

(3) **Da'if** ("Weak"): A *hadith* that does not satisfy all the five criteria for acceptance. It is important to understand that *da'if* does not equate with false. *Da'if Ahadith* are further categorized according to continuity in the chain of transmission:

- (a) **Muttasil** ("Continuous"): No narrator at any stage of narration is missing, thereby making the chain continuous.
- (b) **Mu'allaq** ("Hanging"): Continuity in the transmission is disturbed at the beginning of the chain.
- (c) **Munqati'** ("Interrupted"): Continuity is disturbed in the middle of the chain.
- (d) **Mu'dal** ("Problematic"): Two or more successive transmitters are missing from the middle of the chain.
- (e) **Mursal** ("Incompletely Transmitted"): The first transmitter, a *Sahabi*, is missing from the chain.

B. Quality of the transmitters

1. Weakness in the integrity of the transmitter

- a. **Mawdu'** ("Fabricated"): A *hadith* whose transmitter is proven to be a forger of *ahadith*.

b. **Munkar** ("Rejected"): A *hadith* narrated by a weak transmitter which disagrees with what is generally reported.

c. **Matruk** ("Abandoned"): A *hadith* transmitted by only one person who is charged with lying.

d. **Mudallas** ("Chain of forged transmitters"): A *hadith* narrated by a transmitter who met the preceding narrator, but did not study under him nor hear the *hadith* directly from him, and yet still transmitted it in a manner implying that he did hear it directly from the original narrator.

e. **Mubham** ("Obscure"): A *hadith* in which one of the transmitters is not named.

f. **Mudraj** ("Interpolated"): A *hadith* to which something has been added in the chain of narration or the text.

2. Defects in the transmitter's memory

- a. **Mudhtarib** ("Shaky"): A *hadith* which is transmitted by different weak channels, none of them being stronger than the other.
- b. **Musahhaf** or **Muharraf** ("Distorted"): A change in the wording of the *hadith* has occurred.
- c. **Al-Maqlub** ("Inverted"): Inversion in the chain of transmission (*sanad*) or words of